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LETTER DATED 15 MAY 1998 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to attach the following two statements concerning the sudden crisis between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued in Asmara, Eritrea on 14 and 15 May 1998, respectively:

1. Statement of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea
2. Statement of the Government of Eritrea calling for an independent inspection

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annexes as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tesfa Alem SEYOUN
Chargé d'affaires a.i.



Annex I

Statement of 14 May 1998 of the Cabinet of Ministers
of the Government of Eritrea

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea has held a meeting in Asmara today, Thursday, 14 May 1998, to consider the statement issued by the Council of Ministers of the Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia which accuses Eritrea of inciting conflict and hatred and pursuing a policy of territorial expansion; condemns Eritrea, alleging that its army has invaded Ethiopian territory by crossing its borders; and warns that Ethiopia will take all the necessary measures to protect its territorial integrity.

The Government and people of Eritrea are greatly saddened by the tone and contents of these grave accusations.

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea noted that there have been, and continue to exist, border disputes in certain localities along the common borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia. These problems have been instigated by the unlawful practices of the Ethiopian army, which occasionally made incursions into these Eritrean territories, dismantling the local administrative structures and committing crimes against the inhabitants.

But despite these periodic occurrences, the Cabinet asserted that the Government of Eritrea has been consistently endeavouring to resolve these recurrent problems through bilateral negotiations with the Government of Ethiopia in a calm and patient manner, cautious to not inflate the problem out of proportion and incite animosity between the two fraternal peoples. The Government of Eritrea has opted for this course of action because it believes that the international boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia is very clear and non-controversial. It knows that the recurrent border incursions that continue to be perpetrated by Ethiopian forces basically emanate from the narrow perspectives of the Administrative Zones.

The Cabinet of Ministers further noted that a Joint Committee had been formed by both Governments to resolve these problems and to delineate on the ground the boundary line. The Cabinet of Ministers asserted that the Government of Eritrea has been exerting all the necessary efforts to expedite the process and facilitate the work of the Joint Committee.

But on Wednesday, 6 May 1998, while the Eritrean delegation was on its way to Addis Ababa for a meeting of the Joint Committee to discuss ways and means for accelerating its work, Ethiopian army contingents that had already penetrated into Eritrean territory in the areas around Badme (south-western Eritrea) opened fire and caused grave damage to Eritrean units that attempted to approach them for dialogue. This unprovoked attack subsequently triggered a cycle of clashes in the area.

Furthermore, while continued talks were under way to resolve the tension provoked by the first attack, an appalling statement aimed at sending an unnecessary message to the peoples of both countries and the international

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community was issued by the Council of Ministers of the Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia.

The Cabinet of Ministers reiterates its firm belief that the enduring mutual interests that exist and bind together the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia cannot be jeopardized by any border dispute. The Cabinet of Ministers accordingly proposes the following framework as a solution to the problem, which has been blown out of proportion.

1. The Government of Eritrea condemns the use of force as it firmly believes and upholds that border disputes of any kind can only be resolved through peaceful and legal means, and not through military means.
2. On the basis of this principle, each party shall publicly announce to the peoples of Eritrea, Ethiopia and the international community the territories that it claims - if any - and designate them on the political map with clear geographical coordinates. Each party shall also accept that the dispute cannot and should not be resolved by force but through peaceful negotiations.
3. Both parties shall agree that all negotiations and understandings that will be conducted henceforth shall be carried out in the presence and through the mediation of a third party. The latter will act as witness and guarantor.
4. Areas under "dispute" shall be demilitarized temporarily and be free from the presence of armies of both countries. The enforcement of this understanding shall be guaranteed by the third party.
5. If the above proposal for resolving the dispute through the involvement of a third party and without further complications is not acceptable, the matter should be referred to international adjudication.

The Government of Eritrea firmly believes that attempts to inflate the minor and temporary problem that has been created along the borders of the two sister countries will not serve the fundamental interests of the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples. The Government of Eritrea pledges that it will, heretofore, spare no efforts to handle the present problem with the requisite patience and responsibility. It does not, accordingly, see any wisdom in precipitating tension through inflammatory campaigns.

The Government of Eritrea therefore calls upon the Government of Ethiopia to pursue a similar path that will promote the interests and good-neighbourliness of the peoples of both countries. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea further reasserts its belief that the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia will maintain and preserve their mutual interests rooted in peace, good-neighbourliness and cooperation.

Annex II

Statement of 15 May 1998 of the Government of Eritrea
calling for an independent inspection

Persisting in its negative approach of imparting a dangerous dimension to the crisis that has unfolded in the past few days, the Ethiopian Government continues to accuse Eritrea of occupying Ethiopian territory by deploying tanks and heavy artillery in the area.

As the statement of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea issued yesterday, 14 May 1998, asserts, Eritrea has not violated the internationally recognized borders between the two countries to encroach on Ethiopian territory. The Government of Eritrea has, moreover, called for a total demilitarization of the areas claimed by either side to allow for the smooth and speedy resolution of the current crisis through the facilitation of a third party.

The Government of Eritrea in addition expresses its readiness to accept an independent inspection by any third party to verify the facts of the matter on the ground.
